



# **Guidance for Departments who employ post-graduate students who teach (Assistant Lecturer)**

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Authors: People and Culture  
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# Introduction

PGR students play an invaluable role in supporting the University's delivery of excellent teaching through their role as Assistant Lecturer (formerly GTA) and Graduate Laboratory Assistants (GLA). In recognition of this, the University pays and contracts Assistant Lecturers (AL) and GLAs in line with other employees to ensure they are treated fairly, as part of our institutional commitment to an inclusive working environment to every member of our community (People Supporting Strategy Priority 1:1). To support teaching excellence, it is important that Departments provide support and development throughout the role in addition to the core central training provided as part of our commitment to develop all staff (PSS Priority 4:25).

At Essex all staff are supported to develop and apply their skills and professional knowledge and expertise to educate and enable every student to realise their full potential, and graduates who teach are also developing the Education side of their own academic practice, which may be beneficial to those seeking an academic career.

The following information sets out clearly opportunities and expectations and covers recruitment, contracts, pay, expectations of the role and of the department, training and support, and lastly, opportunities for those who don't teach but are interested in developing the education side of an academic role.

## Assistant Lecturer or GLA?

Departments tend to recruit either ALs or GLAs dependent upon their needs, but what is the difference? Put simply, ALs teach, while GLAs support teaching. ALs can expect to be alone in a classroom (or online setting) with their students, leading the session. They may also be required to provide academic support hours for students.

Whereas GLAs will mainly be supporting an academic in a practical setting such as a laboratory or PC Lab and wouldn't normally be expected to lead a session or be alone with students without academic support.

To reflect the differences in the roles, the training requirements and pay also differ between ALs and GLAs. A separate guidance document is available for GLAs.

# Recruitment & Selection

To support excellence in teaching, Departments are expected to set out expectations for ALs at the outset and provide support and development throughout the role.

The following documents set out guidance as to how departments should recruit their graduate teaching staff.

- [AL employment guidance Advertising roles](#)
  - [AL appointment/ online engagement form \(Onbase\)](#)
  - [requires OpenVPN off-campus] - [Onbase guidance AL job description template](#)
  - [GLA job description template AL employment checklist](#)
1. All posts must have a job description setting out hours, the duties to be undertaken and the skills and experience required. Posts will be salaried, with the specified hours representing a reasonable allocation of the time needed to carry out all the required duties.
  2. Graduate teachers (ALs) will be placed on a fixed-term overarching employment contract until they complete or withdraw from postgraduate studies or enter further completion or an extension to completion period. Although the contract will be in place for the duration of postgraduate studies, ALs will need to apply for individual posts and will have no entitlement to future engagements beyond their initial post. Each engagement letter and job description will form part of and will activate the employment contract.
  3. Departments must ensure that full consideration is given to what is required from the postholder before it is advertised.
  4. Vacancies should be advertised on a University-wide basis.
  5. Postgraduate research students are eligible to apply for AL posts except when they are in further completion or an extension to the completion period. It may not always be appropriate for first-year students who are settling into their research to work as an Assistant Lecturer. Research supervisors need to agree that progress is good and that students can apply or continue to apply for AL roles and agree on the number of hours to be worked.
  6. Any restrictions on hours set out in the University's Regulations for Research Degrees, RCUK training grant or any other scholarship will apply.
  7. There are additional restrictions on sponsored students under a Tier 4 visa and the University has a responsibility to ensure, as far as possible, that students are not employed under terms that breach their visa conditions. Students are required to inform their home department if they are undertaking other work in the University; People and Culture is also required to do

so. Departments are advised to seek advice if they wish to employ a sponsored student as a AL.

8. All short-listed candidates should be interviewed by the module supervisor and one other member of staff engaged in teaching. They should be assessed against the person specification, in particular the ability to communicate academic and teaching material clearly.
9. One member of the interviewing panel should have completed recruitment and selection training.
10. Feedback should be provided on candidates' interview performance and suitability for the role once the selection process is complete. Candidates who are not selected on the grounds of communication skills should be advised on the support available to them to prepare for future applications, ensuring that every member of our community can benefit from the development and support available to them (PSS Priority 5:36).

For more information, contact: Your Department Manager or [resourcing@essex.ac.uk](mailto:resourcing@essex.ac.uk)

## Contracts & Pay

Contracts for ALs are fixed-term contracts that will come to an end when the student completes their studies. An overarching contract is in place which is activated when the student begins a work engagement. All contracts must be accompanied by an engagement letter and job description. Additional guidance can be found in the following documents;

- [Introduction to using HR Organiser](#)
- [Salary scales](#)

Assistant Lecturer roles will be scheduled and paid via Essex Hours, which is a part of the People and Culture system (Itrent). The department will schedule the working hours each week for each AL. The department will submit these to payroll and pay will be according to the hours worked in the month of pay. Therefore, pay could fluctuate each month but the total hours over the engagement period will be as agreed in the engagement letter.

Further information on the system, can be found on [Essex Hours](#).

Each module the AL works on will be identified as an additional role in their employment record, and will be identified in the job title by the module code. E.g. Assistant Lecturer – B12345.

The AL can then easily identify pay according to each role they hold as this detail will be pulled through to their payslip.

Contact: [resourcing@essex.ac.uk](mailto:resourcing@essex.ac.uk)

# Expectations & Support

[Quick guide for departments managing ALs](#)

## AL co-ordinator or DM

In most departments, there is an appointed AL coordinator who takes the lead on supporting PGRs who teach. In some departments, this role is taken by the Departmental Manager.

## AL reps

Departments are required to facilitate representation for PGRs who teach. ALs should have a say in electing their representative, who should be invited to Student Voice and/or teaching team meetings/ away days to sustain an environment where decisions are informed by different perspectives (PSS Priority 1:2).

ALs are also eligible to join the [UCU](#) for free while they are employed by the University.

## Module supervisor

The Module supervisor who employs the AL will be the main contact for support and should be the line manager. They should provide guidance and content for teaching as well as discuss development opportunities and provide developmental feedback on performance.

## Teaching observations

All ALs are required to be observed annually and provided with developmental feedback. This will normally be carried out by the Module supervisor or the AL coordinator. It would not be appropriate for observations to be undertaken by other ALs.

## Supporting students

In addition to the academic side of the role is an equally important pastoral care role. As such ALs should familiarise themselves with the help and support available at the University. It is not your role to solve student's personal problems, but you should be prepared to signpost them to the appropriate supports. The video introduces the student Wellbeing & inclusivity Service (SWIS) and additional guidance on supporting the diverse range of student needs can be found on the [SWIS webpages](#).

[Student Wellbeing and Inclusivity Service](#) - [video 6:44 mins]

# Marking

ALs should not be employed solely for marking and guidance on marking by PGRs is covered in section 4 of the [University Marking Policy](#).

## Examples of good practice supporting ALs

- Multiple teaching observations throughout the course of the academic year (LiFTS).
- Provided with tips on classroom management (SPAH).
- Inclusion in teaching away days (EBS, PPS, History).
- Handbooks with clear expectations (SPAH, Law).
- Good practice sharing events with staff and experienced ALs (SPAH, EBS, LiFTS).
- AL representative present at all Departmental meetings to put forward agenda points/ feedback from ALs (History).
- During Welcome Week, ALs meet all students in an event organised by the Department (PPS).

## Supporting your ALs

- Encourage ALs to attend all induction events, both held by Organisational Development and within your own Departments. The Departmental event should cover Departmental teaching and assessment practices, student progress procedures, and guidance on academic content.
- Mandatory training for ALs is currently 17 hours over the course of the first year of teaching, for which they should be paid. This includes 6 hours for a central University induction, 3 hours for essential training (How We Work At Essex) and 8 hours towards the completion of their CADENZA application for Associate Fellowship.
- An initial meeting between ALs and their Module Supervisor(s) should be organised. Regular contact and/or meetings should then be maintained throughout the year.
- Provide time for discussions with ALs on timetables, classes and requirements for teaching.



- Ensure ALs are included in Departmental information and communication networks, so they are consulted where appropriate, involved in away days etc. In short, they should be treated the same as any other member of staff.
- Provide opportunities for ALs to meet their peers and share knowledge, ideas and reflections on their own teaching experiences. Such opportunities should be offered at least twice per year.
- ALs have told us that they find written guidance from their Department invaluable. This may be in the form of a handbook and could include information about teaching arrangements, responsibilities and expectations.

## **Example Departmental AL Handbooks**

[LiFTS Handbook](#),

[EBS Handbook](#)

To support ALs meet the expectations of their Departments and the University, all new ALs must have a job description. It is also beneficial for new ALs to have a meeting with the module supervisor to set out what is expected of them and give them an opportunity to ask questions.

ALs should be given information regarding training and induction events. This should cover events organised by Organisational Development and the Department for example assessment and feedback. Inductions and training sessions are mandatory and the requirement to achieve Associate Fellowship of the HEA should be highlighted.

At Essex we aim to benchmark our workplace environment against established internal and external recognition frameworks such as Advance HE's UKPSF. ALs are required to achieve Associate Fellow (D1) status with AdvanceHE (formerly the Higher Education Academy) through the University's professional recognition process, CADENZA, before going on to teach for a second year. For this purpose, we consider a year of teaching to be two full terms (usually Autumn and Spring terms). Further guidance can be found in the [CADENZA Moodle pages](#).

Organisational Development (OD) run a number of support workshops and writing events to support Fellowship applicants. ALs are also welcome to attend wider education development offered by OD, such as the Education Insights series and the [Introduction to teaching in HE Moodle course](#) (Log-in required).

Contact: [Develop@essex.ac.uk](mailto:Develop@essex.ac.uk)

# Training & Development

## Central induction

A role-based academic induction will provide access to a peer- learning community so all ALs are required to attend a central induction totalling 6 hours. You will be paid for this time, so attendance is compulsory.

ALs who have attended previously are welcome, but will not be paid (again) and are not required to attend.

ALs who hold contracts can book themselves a place by searching 'AL' on [HR Organiser](#).

The central induction includes sessions on preparing to teach, classroom management, engaging students, active learning techniques, along with an introduction to Student Support and CADENZA.

If you miss the relevant event for unavoidable reasons, they are repeated in the Spring term and you should attend the next available event. Departments should provide a local induction before students teach. This should include a meeting with the module supervisor.

ALs should be treated the same as all staff and as such are required to complete the Essential training required of all University staff titled '[How We Work At Essex](#)'.

## Cadenza and Associate Fellowship

ALs are required to attain Associate Fellow status with AdvanceHE (formerly the Higher Education Academy) through the University's professional recognition framework 'CADENZA', before commencing the second year of teaching. For this purpose, we consider a year of teaching to be two full terms, which may be undertaken across multiple academic years.

## Departmental induction

Departments must ensure they provide effective induction, guidance and networking opportunities, including:

- Early in each academic year, a briefing meeting for new Graduate Teachers providing formal induction on the role, departmental teaching and assessment practices, student progress procedures, and guidance on academic content.
- Written guidance e.g. a handbook on teaching arrangements, responsibilities and expectations.

## **Meeting with Module supervisor**

Assistant Lecturers should be provided with support and guidance from the module supervisor to enable them to carry out their teaching duties. This will include guidance on the teaching materials to be used and the preparation expected.

Teaching should normally be undergraduate class teaching/seminars or demonstrating, using existing teaching materials. Lecturing duties, and any delivery of teaching at Masters level, would not usually be undertaken by ALs and must be associated with a student's research interest, and requires prior approval from the Deputy Dean (Education) of the relevant Faculty in which the teaching will be conducted. Lecturing duties should be as directed by and under the supervision of the module supervisor.

## **Teaching Observations**

Module supervisors must conduct an assessment of performance and provide developmental feedback. An assessment must be made at the end of the probation period as to whether it is appropriate to confirm the appointment. Assessment should include a teaching observation within the first four-to-five weeks of teaching, and moderation of marking (where relevant), with consultation of the student's supervisor to ensure that there is no negative impact on their research. Observations should be undertaken by a member of academic staff, most typically, the module supervisor.

Departments should maintain systems for monitoring the quality of teaching, which should include documented observation of teaching, the dates of observations and names of observers to be held on departmental records. Each AL should be allocated a mentor, normally the relevant course/module supervisor.

## **Ongoing training & development**

Assistant Lecturers must engage in professional development activity relating to teaching, learning and assessment responsibilities. All mandatory training time will be paid.

Module supervisors have a duty to ensure that they regularly discuss learning and development needs and activity with the Assistant Lecturers they are supervising. They must also ensure that individuals have time to undertake training.

## **Opportunity to meet peers**

Departments should make every effort to ensure the integration of ALs into course/module teaching teams for example: including them in Departmental information and communication networks, consulting them where appropriate on module development and review, involvement in awaydays etc.

At the end of the Autumn term and at the end of each academic year, a Departmental seminar/workshop, aimed at sharing good practice and providing a preliminary induction for potential new ALs should be held.

Assistant Lecturers should also ensure they seek guidance where necessary and make a contribution to the work of the Department as part of the teaching team to the extent that time allows.

## **Assessment & Feedback**

Any marking duties should be in line with Section 4 of the [Marking Policy](#). A graduate research student should be employed to mark examinations only when the individual has taught the whole or a significant part of the module. Graduate teachers should be paid for marking based on a realistic assessment of hours. Permission must be sought in advance from the relevant Faculty Dean, on the basis of a case made by the Head of Department.

[AL/GLA Exam and Coursework Marking Application Form](#)

Where marking is to be undertaken, a marking schedule and guidance should be provided or developed in conjunction with ALs. The [Marking Policy](#) also covers details of moderation requirements where PGR students undertake marking.

Contact: [Develop@essex.ac.uk](mailto:Develop@essex.ac.uk)

# **Summary of Responsibilities**

## **Assistant Lecturers**

- Engaging with the guidance provided by the module supervisor on the duties of the role including the use of teaching materials and preparation.
- Engaging in professional development activity relating to teaching, learning and assessment responsibilities.
- Undertaking training necessary for the role, including attending the relevant central and departmental inductions, completion of the essential training in the first term, and preparing an application for Associate Fellowship of the HEA through CADENZA.

## **Module Supervisor**

- Developing the job description, interviewing, and providing feedback.
- Guidance on duties of the role, including teaching materials and preparation.
- Discussing professional development needs and activity undertaken by the AL.

- Supporting the students' delivery of material and development and moderating of criteria for assessment and feedback.

## **Head of Department**

- Approving all job descriptions before release and ensuring affordability.
- Ensuring that selection is undertaken appropriately, including the development of a full job description.
- Integration of ALs into the teaching team and department.
- Provision of effective induction, guidance and networking opportunities.
- Ensuring that teaching quality is monitored.
- Informing Organisational Development of any emerging training needs.
- Seeking approval from the Deputy Dean (Education) for any lecturing or marking duties to be undertaken.

## **Faculty Deputy Dean (Education)**

- Approving the suitability of ALs to undertake lecturing or marking duties.

For further guidance please contact [Develop@essex.ac.uk](mailto:Develop@essex.ac.uk)